

## Guidelines for Writing an Account of Practice

Action Learning has come to be very widely used across the world in varying ways and with a diversity of applications, including and leadership and professional development, organisational problem-solving, strategy making, service improvements, innovation, culture change, inter-agency working, tackling social problems, policy learning, research and no doubt more.

If you have a story to tell about your experience of Action Learning we invite you to write an Account of Practice (AoP). An AoP is a paper of 2,000 - 3,500 words providing thoughtful reflections on practice. AoPs are more than just a platform for the exchange of techniques and writing an AoP should give consideration to what might best help the thoughtful practice and understanding of the journal's readers. We are interested in the insights you can share, so we ask you to consider what would be of value to readers' understanding and application of Action Learning.

Because we do not all mean the same thing when we use the term 'Action Learning', as a starting point, AoP authors are asked to explain the assumptions about Action Learning they bring to their practice and to make explicit where they take their thinking about Action Learning from. In this way readers can relate the particular AoP with a wider body of knowledge about Action Learning and can better judge whether the insight offered by the author might apply in their own different contexts. A long reference list of everything ever written on Action Learning is not required. Unlike the extensive referencing required for refereed papers, AoPs need enough to enable readers to connect a specific AoP to what else they know about Action Learning.

AoPs are also not expected to be heroic success stories. The uniqueness of AoPs lies in the author's story and their own authentic thoughtfulness about their practice. Therefore we ask you to locate yourself in the story – to make visible your role and involvement in the process. We are certainly interested in ways in which Action Learning, alone and in combination with other methods, offers potential for addressing issues and stimulating learning than many other management and learning approaches. However, of equal interest are experiences of situations and people Action Learning has not suited. We welcome insights into ways of initiating and facilitating Action Learning that work better than others; explorations of why it works or does not, and examples of what goes on within a set or within a particular organisation or community. AoPs can be a celebration of the power of Action Learning, but equally can shed light on questions we do not understand.

### **Summary of points to cover:**

- i. Context – where and when this took place
- ii. Locate yourself in the story: your role (manager, AL group member, external facilitator...); your stake/interest and outcomes you wanted
- iii. Purpose of using Action Learning – expectations and intentions
- iv. Who was involved

- v. Your thinking - what Action Learning ideas have you used and where did this thinking come from? What is the source of these ideas?
- vi. Assumptions - why was Action Learning expected to deliver results in this context
- vii. What happened – how did Action Learning groups form, what actions were taken, how was learning facilitated, endings etc
- viii. Outcomes – what was the result, what worked well, what did not. Why do you think this was?
- ix. What insights have you gained?
- x. What lessons are there to share with others?

### **An AoP in brief**

- Total length 2,000 – 3,500 words
- Abstract of 100 - 200 words
- Up to six keywords: core terms that capture the AoP's content, one of which should be 'Action Learning'
- Short biographical note about the author(s) up to 50 words
- Author address and email

Advice on referencing and copyright is on Taylor & Francis Author Services website, which can be found at <http://journalauthors.tandf.co.uk/>

### **Suggestions for getting started**

We recognise that writing an Account of Practice may not come easily, particularly for people busy using Action Learning who don't often write for journals.

Ideas to help authors start writing:

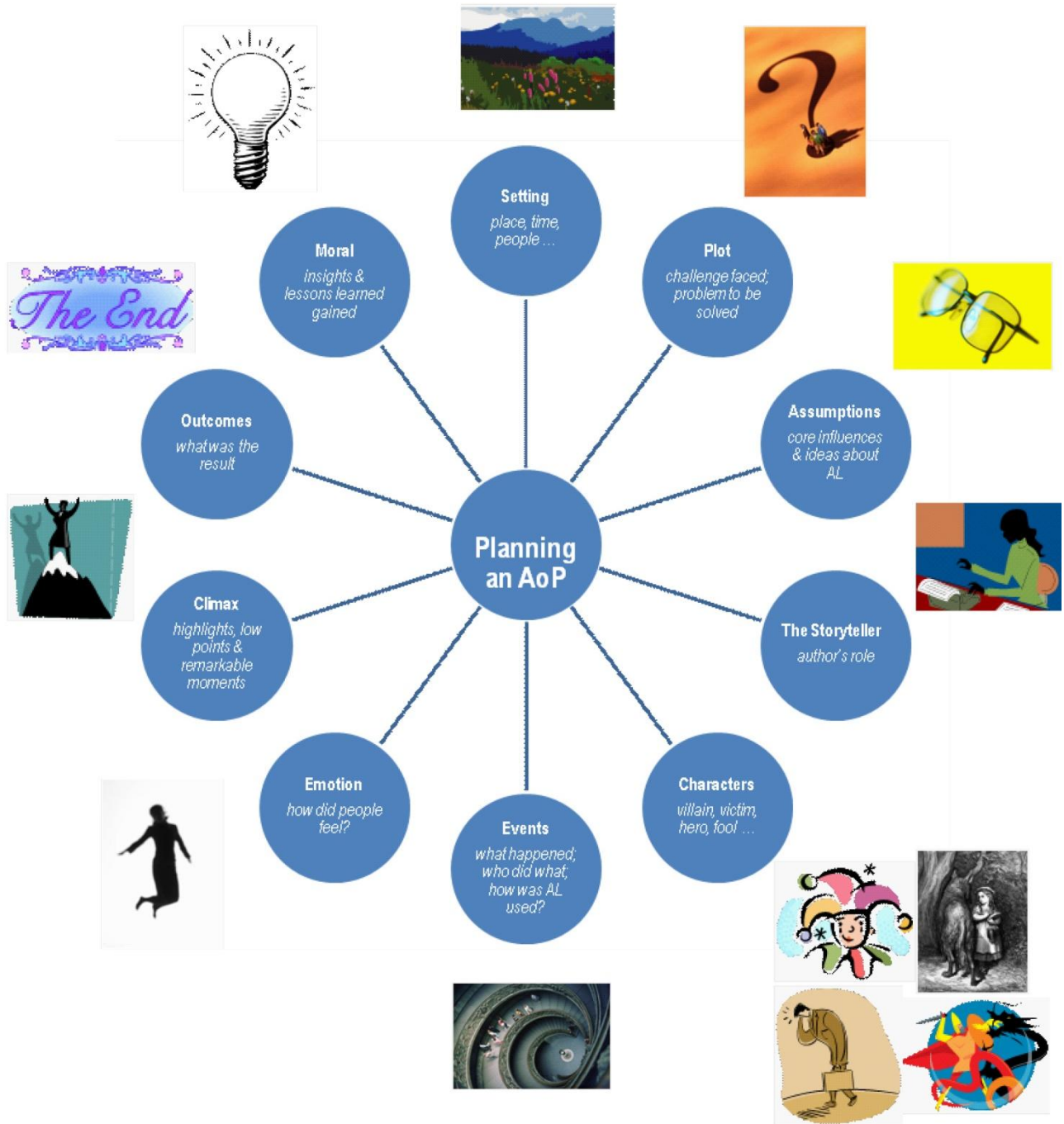
- Record yourself talking about it, then convert the recording into text.
- Use a metaphor to describe your Action Learning experience, e.g. if it were an expedition ..... Then follow this metaphor to write up an account.
- Use story-telling. Follow the suggestions below for creating a story of your experience.

### **All stories have certain common characteristics:**

- They have characters, a setting, a plot (a series of events), a climax, and in fairy there is usually a moral, or learning, to take away.
- Characters typically include a villain, someone in trouble, a hero and maybe a fool.
- The voice of the story teller is also important

The pictures below can be used as themes to build up the story. For example, **Setting** – where and when did it happen? **Assumptions** – core assumptions and ideas about AL? **Story teller** – what was your own role in this? **Victim** – who or what was in trouble? ...

Use each one as a prompt to help plan aspects of your account, then weave them together to construct the story.



Sample AoPs can be found on the journal's website [www.tandfonline.com/calr](http://www.tandfonline.com/calr)

Send completed AoPs to: Professor David Coghlan at [DCOGLAN@tcd.ie](mailto:DCOGLAN@tcd.ie) or Dr Clare Rigg at [clare.rigg@staff.ittralee.ie](mailto:clare.rigg@staff.ittralee.ie)